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LETTER DATED 10 FEBRUARY 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you the attached statement I made at the Security Council meeting today, 10 February 1999, on the agenda item entitled "The situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia", presenting my Government's central concern in the overall content of draft resolution S/1999/133, which was subsequently adopted by the Council (resolution 1227 (1999)).

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the text of the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement made on 10 February 1999 by the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations at the Security Council meeting on the agenda item entitled "The situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia"

I am honoured to address the Security Council in this meeting to consider the current draft resolution on the Eritrea/Ethiopia conflict. Indeed, my Government appreciates the serious concern of the Council regarding the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the dangerous level it has been escalated to the Ethiopian Government. Eritrea further welcomes the Council's decision to be actively seized of the issue.

My Government presented in writing its considered reaction to the last resolution concerning the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia (resolution 1226 (1999)), and I need not repeat it here. Needless to say, the concerns that Eritrea tried to alert the Security Council about in its presentation have unfortunately come to pass. Ethiopia has broken the de facto truce that had existed since June and restarted an all-out offensive against Eritrea.

It is a fact known to members of the Security Council that Eritrea has constantly and consistently called from the outset of this conflict for the renouncement of the use and threat of use of force, for a firm, irreversible commitment to a peaceful and legal solution of the conflict, for a binding ceasefire or cessation of hostilities so that a conducive atmosphere could be created for the peace process to continue and succeed. Such calls were repeated by the international community, including the Council. Sadly, these calls were adamantly rejected by Ethiopia. Nonetheless, Eritrea continued to engage in all peace endeavours by concerned parties in good faith, reaffirming that despite Ethiopia's constant threats and declared preparations for war, it shall never shoot unless shot at.

My country has been shot at and forced to defend itself in the current all-out offensive unleashed on it by the Ethiopian regime. Indeed, the fact that Ethiopia intended and was preparing to do just that was never hidden from the international community. Consistent with its Parliament's standing declaration that unless Eritrea unilaterally and unconditionally withdraws from its own territory that Ethiopia claims, Ethiopia will make it do so by force, the Ethiopian Government has, going from bad to worse, escalated this conflict from a containable border skirmish to an all-out war.

The fact that Ethiopia started this offensive and violated the United States-brokered moratorium on air attacks has been contrary to its useless but usual attempt to deny it, ascertained by all those who have followed and witnessed its final preparations and the actual launch and conduct of its current offensive. We can only be convinced that this fact cannot be unknown to your Governments as well, as representatives of the diplomatic communities in either or both countries, those of your Governments included, have followed or witnessed the facts for themselves.

Summarizing the overwhelming independent eyewitness reports of the developments on the ground, Global Intelligence Update writes "Ethiopia launched an offensive against neighbouring Eritrea on 6 February, ostensibly aimed at retaking the disputed border area of Badme". The Update continues to warn "the problem for international organizations attempting to broker a peace treaty between the two countries is that the dispute is not that simple. Ethiopia has not expended an estimated $300 million on arms since last June simply to retake a desolate patch of rocks".

Concerning the violation of the moratorium on air strikes, no less than President Clinton, the broker and thus custodian of that moratorium, has clearly indicated that it is Ethiopia that did so. He said: "I am particularly alarmed by the recent use of air power, which escalates the conflict and violates the agreed moratorium. I urge the Ethiopian Government to refrain from further use of its aircraft as currently employed along the border". A myriad of independent on-site witnesses of the Ethiopian air bombardment of towns and other civilian centres, including shelters set up for deportees from Ethiopia some 30 kilometres away from the war front, have reported the death of innocent civilians and devastation of property such bombings are causing.

The danger that Ethiopia's all-out war poses for the security of the entire region and wider, far from its immediate negative consequences on the process for a peaceful resolution of the border dispute, cannot escape you. While these remain the facts and consequences of the Ethiopian Government's persistent recourse to force, it is indeed tragic and regrettable that the Security Council, the very body entrusted with ensuring international security, would gloss over this dangerous reality, and not condemn the Ethiopian regime for its irresponsible resort to force to solve what indeed is a border conflict. Not to do so, to allow the Ethiopian regime to continue to wage war with impunity in violation of another country's sovereignty would only encourage Ethiopia, as it has done so far, to continue on its war path with very grave consequences. The Council will then have to share responsibility for those consequences.

Ethiopia alone bears full responsibility for the start and escalation of this conflict to a full-scale war, including starting the current offensive. Eritrea urges the Security Council to take note of this fact, to resolve accordingly and act appropriately.